



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

**Dhúiche Sheoigheach
& Lochanna an Iarthair**

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT

PLACE NAMES AND GEOLOGY IN THE
JOYCE COUNTRY AND WESTERN LAKES REGION



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A Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geo Enterprise publication

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Introduction

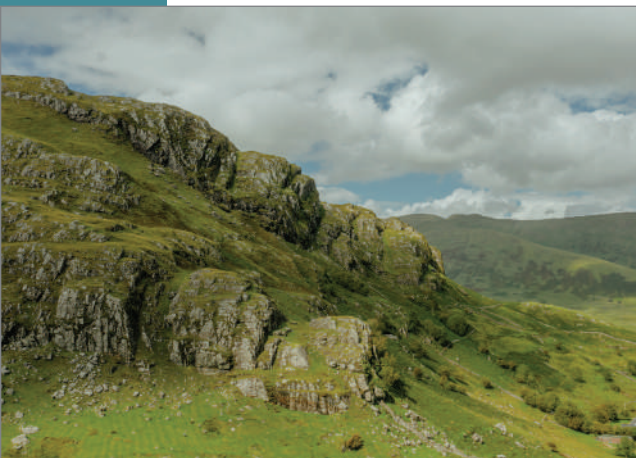
Place names or logainmeacha in Irish are a treasure trove of information on the Irish landscape today or as it was in the past. They tell the stories of the extensive oak forest cover of Ireland, of wolves roaming the landscape and of islands that are now part of the mainland. These are the names of the rivers, lakes and mountains, of the towns and villages, but also very usefully of a multitude of relatively small land divisions called townlands (bailte fearainn in Irish) which date back at least to the early Middle Ages. Their size varies with townlands in mountainous or boggy areas being often much larger than in good farming land, indicating their initial use as a division of profitable land for agriculture. There are over 60,000 townlands in the island of Ireland that are all entered in a database accessible at www.logainm.ie.

The region of the Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark Project has about 630 townlands but there are many more smaller places such as landmarks in the landscapes or individual fields that have a name, many of which have unfortunately been lost over time. And it is the same all over Ireland. A number of projects are under way across the country to record this knowledge from the older generation, in particular in the Gaeltacht areas where these names might still be in use today

What Are Place Names?

Place names are descriptions of elements of the landscape carrying information of its physical features (hill, meadow, slope, etc), the conditions of the ground (rocky, boggy, etc), the name of a famous owner or mythical visitor, a species of plant or animal, a man-made feature (ring fort, bridge, etc) and other aspects of the landscape. Another aspect is the local geology, local geological features or a former activity linked with the local geology. Below is a list of Irish terms found in place names in the Geopark region referring to the local geology, their meaning and the spelling that has been used for them in the English version of the place name. The names with an asterisk * have additional information on their geographical spread available on the logainm.ie website.

Lakes Marble Formation outcrop at Cur Hill

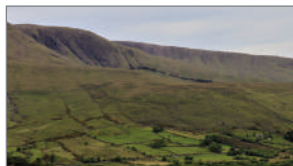


Cur Hill from the south west

IRISH	MEANINGS	ENGLISH SPELLINGS FOUND IN GEOPARK
Áighe	pillar, outcrop	aya
Ail/Fail*	cliff	aille, ellagh
Alltaigh	rugged place	alty
Aoil	lime	eel
Barr*	top, knoll	bar, bur
Beartrach	sandbank	bertragh
Binn*	peak	ben
Buacán	small or conical hill	boocaun
Carn*	cairn, pile of stones	carn
Carraig/Carr*	rock	carrick, carrigeen, carreen, cargin
Claídeach	rocky foreshore	clydagh
Clog/Cloch*	rock, stone, boulder	clogh, clogher, clag, cleigh, glogh
Cnoc*	hill	knock
Coire	corry, cirque	curry
Corr*	round hill	cor, cur
Creag/Creagán*	crag, rocky place, outcrop	creg, cregga, greggaun
Cruach	stack, pile	croagh
Cuas/Cuasán*	cave	coos, ghoosh
Dabhach	pond	dowagh
Deirc	cave, hollow	dirk
Droim/Dromainn*	ridge, drumlin	drum, drummin, drumneen
Eas	waterfall	-ass, ash, aas

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Vertical beds at
Maumtrasna from
Nafooney valley



Cross stratification at Leenane

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IRISH	MEANINGS	ENGLISH SPELLINGS FOUND IN GEOPARK
Eiscir/Eisceach*	esker, ridge	esker, isker, ascragh, escragh
Farnacht	bare hill	farnaght
Gallach	place of (standing) stones	gallagh
Iarainn	iron	-ierin
Iomaire	mountain ridge	ummera
Leac/leacán*	flag stone	lecka, lacka, leck
Log*	hollow	lug
Lomán	outcrop of rock	lummaun
Mám	mountain pass	maum, maam
Maoil/maoileann	rounded summit, hillock	mweel, mweelaun
Mianach	mine, ore	-veeny
Mullach*	summit	mullagh
Oilí	rocky place, outcrop	elly
Poll*	hole, cave	poll
Ruibh	sulphur-ore	riff
Scainimh	shingle ridge	scanniff
Sindile	thin ridge	shintilla
Sliabh*	mountain, moor	levy, slieve
Tobar*	well, spring	tober, tubber, dober
Tulach/tulaigh*	mound, hillock	tullagh, tully
Turlach	turlough, winter lake	turlough
Uisce	water, spring	isky

Geology in the Geopark Area

There are some excellent examples of the influence of local geology in place names of our area. For instance, Cloghbrack (or an Chloch Bhreac, meaning the speckled or spotty rock) is an area overlooking the lower Lough Mask that is underlain by a bedrock of schist which contains large white quartz crystals speckled throughout the rock.



"Speckled" schist at Cloghbrack

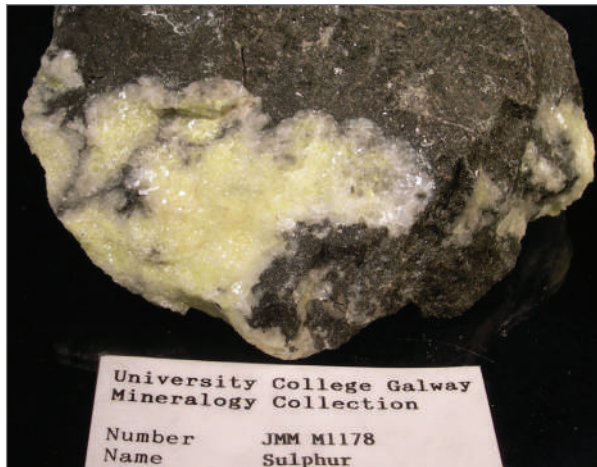


▲ Stone with place name at entrance of Cloghbrack



The river and townland of Aille (or an Aill, the cliff) is occupying a plain over Carboniferous limestone (dating to about 350 million years ago); the cliff mentioned is an outcrop of the limestone under which the river flows underground in a karst cave.

◀ Limestone cliff at Aille



Another river with a remarkable name is the Owenriff (or abhain ruibhe, river of brimstone or sulphur) flowing east through the town of Oughterard into Lough Corrib. Nodules of sulphur were recognisable in the local Carboniferous limestone, in fact there exists the remains of a sulphur mine to the north of the town along the Western Way.

◀ Yellow sulphur minerals in limestone from the Owenriff river

There are a few townlands named clogher (or an clochar, the rocky place) in the plains of Ireland and that is due to the effect of the Ice Age eroding the limestone bedrock flat and either leaving a thin cover of sediments over the rock or a larger cover of till sediment that is a mix of sand and gravel and larger stones. The removal of these stones in any new tillage field is hard work and even fields that were initially cleared can see rock reappearing the next season due to an upward movement of the stones with the contraction and swelling of the surrounding sediments with changing temperatures.

Fields with many naturally occurring loose stones



Lackavrea, a quartzite mountain of “uneven flat stones” on the shores of Lough Corrib



The Ice Age had similar effects in the uplands. Although not flattening the local bedrock, it removed most of the soil or sediment cover to uncover outcrops or crags (creig in Irish) a word often found in the area. Sometimes these outcrops were so grinded and smoothed by the moving ice that they appeared as leac meaning a flatstone as in Lackavrea (or Leac Amhraídh, uneven flat stone).

And of course, there are several examples of place names with the word dromainn (meaning small ridge) which became the internationally recognised word **drumlin** for low elongated glacial ridges deposited and fashioned below a moving ice sheet.

Other glacial features found in Ireland and whose Irish names are internationally recognised are **eskers** from the Irish eiscir meaning ridge that cuts through the landscape (gravel ridge that carried melt water and sediments below the ice sheets) and **corries** (also known as cirques) that comes from the Irish coire meaning large pot or cauldron.

Saint's Island on Lough Mask, a drumlin island



Karst features are plentiful in the limestone east of our region. These include caves, springs, dolines (isolated depressions or holes in the surface) and **turloughs** (seasonal lakes linked, fed and emptied through ground water table changing levels). Many of these are reflected in the place names of the area, sometimes highlighting features now lost. The words associated with these are tobair (well, spring), poll (hole, cave), cuas (cave) and others. Many natural springs were consecrated as holy wells by the early christian missionaries as was the case with Tobair Phádraig (or Saint Patrick's Well) at Ballintubber (or Baile an Tobair, the village of the well).

St Patrick's Well, a natural
spring in Ballintubber,
overlooked by a
sculpture of St Patrick by
Brother Joseph McNally



Lackavrea on Lough Corrib



The following are some other examples of place names of the geopark area referring to the local geology:

ENGLISH	IRISH	MEANING	TYPE
Aasleagh Falls	Eas Liath	grey waterfall	other
Aille	An Aill	the cliff	townland
Ballinaya	Baile an Áighe	the townland of the pillar	townland
Ballintober	Baile an tobair	the townland of the well	townland
Ben Gorm	Binn Ghorm	the blue peak	mountain peak
Bencorragh	An Bhinn Charrach	the rocky peak	mountain peak
Cappaghooish	Ceapach Chuais	tillage plot of the cave	townland
Cargin	An Carraigin	the small stone	townland
Cloghbrack	An Chloch Bhreac	the speckled rock	townland
Clogher	An Clochar	the rocky place	townland
Cooslughoga	Cuas Luchóige	cave of the mouse	townland
Cregdotia	An Chreig Dhóite	burned rock	townland
Derryveeney	Doire Mhianaigh	thicket of the mine	townland
Dirkbeg	An Deirc Bheag	the small hollow/cave	townland

ENGLISH	IRISH	MEANING	TYPE
Drumminroe	An Dromainn Rua	the red ridge	townland
Flag Island	Oileán na Leac	flag island	island
Lackavrea	Leic Aimhréidh	uneven flat stone	townland
Lacknakillen	Leac na Cile	flagstone of the church	other
Letterass	Leitir Easa	hillside of the waterfall	townland
Loughaunierin	Loch an Iarainn	iron lake	lake
Lugacurry	Log an Choire	hollow of the Corrie	mountain peak
Monalummaun	Móin na Lomán	the bog of the outcrops of rock	other
Mountross	Ros Iarainn	the peninsula of Iron	townland
Owenaglogh	Abhainn na gCloch	river of the stones	river
Owenriff	Abhainn Ruibhe	river of brimstone/sulphur	river
Pollawaddy	Poll an Mhadaidh	the hole of the dog	townland
Rinaneel	Rinn an Aoil	promontory of the lime	townland
Turlough	An Turlach	the turlough	townland



Pillow lava outcrop
at Bencorragh



The white marl waters of "Fionn"
Loch Ceara or Lough Carra

A Rainbow of Geology

Colours are particularly used to describe the landscape, rivers, lakes and mountains and although not exclusively, they tend to originate from the colour of the local stone. You can recognise some of them like dubh, bán, glas, buí and rua which respectively mean black, white, green, yellow and rusty red. An oft cited example is Fionnloch Ceara, the old name of Lough Carra which included fionn which means white or fair. In this case, it comes from the white marl deposit of calcite at the bottom of the shallow lake which reflects sunlight due to the purity of the water there.

Stone with place name at Aill Dubh



Black "cliffs" of ignimbrite at Aill Dubh



The black colour is often linked with peaty water containing a lot of iron and appearing black when flowing through and out of a bog. But they sometimes reflect the colour of the local rock as in Aill Dubh (the black cliff) where layers of a type of volcanic ash called ignimbrite stand out of the mountain slope with their very dark colour. The rusty red colour indicated with rua can be linked to local flora like heather and sphagnum moss growing in the bog, they can also relate to the colour of the local rock as in Killary (or an Caoláire rua, the red inlet) or an t-lomaire rua (meaning the red ridge), an old term for the uplands of the wider western region such as the red sandstone of Mweelrea, the highest peak of Connacht.

Other examples
from the Geopark
project area:

ENGLISH	IRISH	MEANING	TYPE
Aasleagh falls	Eas Liath	grey falls	other
Aillebaun	An Aill Bhán	the white cliff	townland
*	Aill dhubh	black cliff	other
Ballydoolough	Baile Dubhloch	townland of the black lake	townland
Ben gorm	Binn Ghorm	blue peak	mountain peak
Black island	An tOileán Dubh	black island	island
Caherduff	An Chathair Dhubh	the black stone fort	townland
Cloghbrack	An Chloch Bhreac	speckled rock	townland
Currarevagh	An Chorr Riabhach	the grey round hill	townland
Dooros	Dubh Ros	black peninsula	townland
Green island	An tOileán Glas	the green island	island
Killary	An Caoláire Rua	the red inlet	other
Knockbaun	An Cnoc Bán	the white hill	townland
Knocknagussy	Binn Dubh/Cnoc an Mháma	black peak	mountain peak
Lackderg	An Leac Dhearg	the red flat stones	townland
Lough Carra	Fionnloch Ceara	white lake of Ceara	lake
Owenduff	An Abhainn Dubh	the black river	river
Owenwee	An Abhainn Bhuí	the yellow river	river
Toberroaun	Tobar Ruáin	well of the red place	townland
Tullaghaboy	Na Tulacha Buí	the yellow mounds	townland
*	An t-Iomaire rua	the red ridge	mountain

* No English version exists for these place names.

For more information on the Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark Project and for more maps and resources, visit our website at: www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie



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